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Intangibles - enhancing access to cities cultural heritage through interpretation

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ABSTRACT: Heritage-related activities are fundamental for the overall tourism experience. Destinations have recognized this and cultural heritage is directly or indirectly playing an important role in their tourism strategies. In particular in destination positioning, where destinations aim to evoke ideally unique images in peoples mind, cultural heritage enables them to do so. These unique images and imaginations can be created using both, tangible and intangible elements. Nevertheless there is still a lack of understanding of the intangibles and their valorization for tourism strategies. This paper focuses on the identification of cultural heritage, in particular its intangible aspects and stories worthwhile to be told, within a destination. It outlines the development of an interpretative strategy independent from, but aligned with, the current marketing and positioning strategy development level on the examples of three cities (Amsterdam, Genoa and Leipzig).

1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of cultural heritage has been recognized by many for tourism experiences, motivations and behavior (Nyapaune 2006, Timothy and Boyd 2003, Prentice & Duncan 1994) and in a similar way for societal and community well-being, and sustainable urban development (Tweed and Sutherland, 2007). This value of heritage has been utilized by destinations, directly or indirectly commodifying it in their tourism marketing strategies (Ashworth et al. 2007) in particular for destination positioning, and brand and image building, cultural heritage is one of the factors which enable destinations to create unique images and imaginations in peoples mind. Destinations have to work hard to keep a competitive advantage in the tourism market, differentiating and customizing their products and services (McCabe 2009, Ritchie and Crouch 2000) in relation to their competitors. In this process positioning relies on both the tangible (physical) and intangible (immaterial) elements of a destination's cultural heritage. Interpretation of this cultural heritage can not only be seen as a gateway of understanding the cultural heritage itself, but also the past and current context of the destination it is embedded in and its people. Developing an interpretative strategy through the evaluation of a destination's cultural heritage, exploring not only its physical representation but also its intangible elements by destination management, its cultural heritage stakeholders and citizen representatives, does not only enable destination to unlock its unique potential but also creates a sense of place that local communities can identify and relate to.

This paper presents research which has been conducted as part of the ISAAC project (European Union's 6th Framework Programme ISAAC IST-2006-035130, www.isaac-project.eu). The project aims to promote cultural heritage tourism through a novel Information Communication Technology (ICT) environment, providing integrated and user-friendly tourism e-services that facilitate wide virtual access to European cultural heritage assets. This paper focuses on the identification of cultural heritage, in particular its intangible aspects and stories worthwhile to

be told, within a destination. It outlines the development of an interpretative strategy independent from, but aligned with, the current marketing and positioning strategy development level on the examples of three cities Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Genoa (Italy) and Leipzig (Germany).

2 DESTINATION POSITIONING

Destination positioning presents a form of market communication and used in tourism marketing it enables tourist destinations to enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness through the development of a unique distinctive position compared to their competitors (McCabe 2009, WTO2006, Selby 2004, Buhalis 2000). This position is necessary to enable potential visitors to picture and visualize the destination in mind as a distinctive place. Ideally this evokes images of a destination which are different from its competitors, which can be based on the differentiation of the offer, the prices, a specialized focus on offering, or a combination of them (Chacko 1997, Kotler et al. 2006) and also mirror the character and personality of the destination (Sainaghi 2006). A successful positioning strategy has the further advantage of enabling the destination to increase its market share, face rising competition, enhance competitiveness or even gain a competitive edge (Buhalis 2000, Go and Govers 2000). For a positioning strategy to be effective, Crompton et al. (1992) suggest that the destination attributes that are perceived as important by the target market should be identified first. Unique Selling Points (USPs) are components of a destination that are unique when compared to its competitors and provide it with an exceptional appeal in relation to market needs. Thus, they are crucial in order to differentiate a destination from its competitors. Kotler et al. (2006) suggest that USPs can consist of a single factor or a combination of several factors (e.g. best quality, best service, lowest price). However, Prentice (2006) argues that effective USPs are re-defined by consumers but may be proposed by destinations. Thus, they should not be assumed, but instead their importance has to be identified and then represented back to consumers. Furthermore, Prentice (2006) enhanced USPs by the tourist's lived experiences and cultural familiarity with a destination.

Positioning itself is mostly based on physical (tangible) qualities and attributes, and heritage (built and natural) is recognized as one of them (McCabe 2009). Cultural heritage is firstly thought of in its physical space, but it extends beyond this. In a sense, not only the fact of existence but also the particular use of the sites (can) make them heritage sites. Heritage can also be the experience in itself, and its apparent how important memory, remembering and performance are (Smith 2006). The physical and material aspects of a destination, called tangibles, include fortified structures, urban developments, monuments and memorials, religious buildings including churches and especially monasteries, buildings associated with production or manufacture (farms, factories, etc.), government or civic buildings, villages, cultural landscapes, and manufactured objects in their context. Contrary, are the intangible (immaterial) qualities of a destination such as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, legends, language, tradition, religion, folklore, music and dance, handicrafts etc. (Copeland and Delmaire 2004, UNESCO 1979). The challenge here is to make use of the intangible aspects. As the tourism product is made up largely of both elements which are sometimes difficult to differentiate, destinations are marketing the intangibles with reference to tangible evidence which is referred to as "tangibilising the intangible" (Black 2005, Chacko 1997) creating an amalgam of tangibles and intangibles. But it is not only about the tangible and intangible components of cultural heritage, the meaning placed upon them and the representations created from them. This adds either cultural or financial value, and explains why they have been selected (Ashworth et. al. 2007). Destination positioning is often expressed through branding and a tool for image creation. Developments in particular in place branding illustrate that the intangibles are essential for destinations, and that the adding value through meaning enables the creation of a sense of place and identity for residents and tourists alike. This is highlighted in the example of Auckland (New Zealand) where stories and what the city is all about are emphasized as the main content to enable the creation of a place identity and brand (Gnoth 2008).

3 HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

Heritage interpretation is about transmitting appreciation or enthusiasm for a place which is thought to be special to people (Carter 2001) and is applied to explain the importance of a place to its visitors (Timothy and Boyd 2003). According to Herbert (1989, p. 191), the role of interpretation is “to make people more aware of the places they visit, to provide knowledge which increases their understanding and to promote interest which leads to greater enjoyment and perhaps responsibility”. It is also a communication instrument to reveal the meaning behind the heritage and the given information by using objects, direct experience and instructive media (Tilden 1957) or an activity used to present a message, or to facilitate an experience within attractions which visitors might not be able to experience without it (Prentice and Cunnell 1997).

One dilemma that heritage interpretation faces is the tendency for people to believe what is presented to them in the name of authority – this is particularly true for messages emerging from public bodies (Hems 2006). Interpretation has to be updated in response to new evidence and research in order to attempt to avoid such problems. Copeland (2006) alerts us to the need to remain aware of the distinctions between positivist and constructivist approaches to interpretation. Important in the context of interpretation is the recognition within constructivist approaches that meanings are always variable and individual, highly complex and contingent upon factors beyond either the message or the medium. Similarly, accounts of existential models of authenticity tell us that authenticity effects are produced in the moment of the individual encounter and are as much about the consumer of an image as about the conditions and intentions of production (Knox 2008, Wang 1999). Copeland (2006) recognizes that visitors bring ideas and assumptions to the site, and that these ready-made ideas need to become part of the interpretation, either challenging or confirming preconceived images (Hems, A. 2006). In this way, heritage venues only become special or unique places in relation to their broader context within cultural environments (Copeland 2006). Additionally, through providing alternative ways of seeing the same object in different contexts, and enabling the visitor to unpeel the different layers of hidden meanings, new audiences can be attracted to cultural heritage sites and existing audiences sustained (Hems 2006).

Interpretation plays an important role in experiencing places and combines both tangible and intangible aspects of the place. This experiential consumption enables destinations to brand and position themselves with unique selling points (USPs). To avoid becoming a substitutable or feel-alike destination, differentiation through USPs (Pike 2009) can be used to enhance the lived experiences and cultural familiarity of a destination as mentioned previously (Prentice 2006). “Effective interpretation must involve audiences in hearing and telling past stories, it emphasises human experience and places it at the core of those stories”, according to Hems (2006 p. 6). In particular, for destinations it means involving people who use the spaces; local people, communities, tourists and stakeholders.

4 WHAT IS AN INTERPRETATIVE STRATEGY?

In general, interpretative strategies are mainly used for attractions, outlining interpretation and the interpretative media used to pursue the key themes and specific messages related to those themes, presenting the attraction to different visitor target groups. This interpretation is more based upon stories underlined with facts. The stories should enable a better understanding of these themes and on the simplest level this should make communication more effective (Carter 2001). Interpretation has been recognized as an important factor at a variety of geographical scales in many different places. For example, the Heritage Council of New South Wales, Australia (Heritage Council NSW 2005) has implemented a heritage interpretation policy. The heritage interpretation policy aims to connect its communities with their heritage and in order to protect and sustain heritage values through interpretation. In more detail, it does not only seek to promote interpretation, but also acknowledge associations and meanings of heritage to the community and integrate heritage interpretation in environmental and cultural planning in

state and local government organizations. In the UK, a HERIAN (HERIAN 2006) comprising an interpretative plan, and also providing an outline and help for local interpretation plans in the industrial communities of South East Wales saw 26 communities participate in 2006.

Interpretative strategies (or sometimes synonymously called interpretation strategy) focus on the bigger picture and act as guidance and a framework to ensure needs are met compared to the more often commonly used interpretation plan, in which more of the details and specifics of the interpretation are planned. As outlined by the Scottish Museums Council (2003b), an interpretative strategy should include (a) aims and objectives, (b) mechanisms, (c) timescales and priorities and (d) budgets and management. In particular, the aims and objectives are related to the destination perspective and the link to positioning strategies and USPs is apparent. The main aims and objectives from an attraction perspective centre around the questions what, why and who. They are presented and adapted from the literature in Table 1 (Black, 2005, Scottish Museums Council 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, Lord and Dexter 2002, Carter 2001) and compared to the destination perspective.

Table 1: Interpretative strategy focus from attraction and destination perspective

Attractions perspective	Destinations perspective
<p>What is special about a museum or site, and what is worthwhile interpreting from it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic areas • Meanings to reveal • Stories to tell • What will interest visitors • What else is being interpreted nearby and how does it relate to this 	<p>Positioning strategy USPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes • Stories to tell • What will interest visitors • Intangible and tangible aspects of cultural heritage
<p>Why the need for interpretation? (Attraction perspective)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase visitors' understanding of exhibits • Encourage conservation ethic • Provide fun and rewarding days out for families • Increase time people spent in museums • Etc. 	<p>Why? (City perspective)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of cultural heritage • Increase visitor numbers • Regeneration • Etc.
<p>Who is the target? To attract new visitors? Improve provision for existing visitors? Need for more research about visitors?</p>	<p>Target markets Tourists (varied groups) Residents Community groups and groups of interests</p>

Similar comparisons can be drawn from the other steps. Mechanisms focus on how the aims and objectives can be achieved, while budget and management also include possible factors affecting the implementation of the aims and objectives.

For destinations, this means that interpretation can be used to enhance a positioning strategy (e.g. by the use of elements such as stories). Interpretation enables destinations to produce varied and more distinctive unique selling points which can be created through experiences of or familiarity with the destination. An interpretative strategy uses the tangible and intangible aspects of a destination to provide key themes about that destinations offer to visitors. Thus, an interpretative strategy enhances a destinations positioning strategy, making it both more distinctive and flags uniqueness.

5 METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this research was to outline a generalized process for producing an interpretative strategies, which can be taken up by the project's partner cities (Amsterdam, Genoa and Leipzig) and any other cities independent from, but aligned with, their current marketing and positioning strategy development level. This should then enable them to develop their own interpretative strategies which can then be taken forward, filled with more specific content and integrated in existing strategies. The methodology employed to achieve this aim was to inform the destinations involved about the aims, and their expected inputs to the development of such an interpretative strategy in advance of holding workshops with them involving both destination and attraction managers, and keeping them integrated and part of the process throughout.

Overall three on-site workshops were held in each city. The first two workshops were held on two consecutive days in September/October 2007. The same workshop was given to two different audiences in each city. The first focused on the destinations management operating at the strategic and institutional level with participants from marketing, branding and regeneration departments and institutions. The second workshop included participants from the cities' wider stakeholder groups (attraction managers and other tourism related businesses) and citizen groups and organizations. This division was made as it was assumed that their perspective on their cities were different ensuring to capture the different views, but also bringing these groups together in a stepwise process. The content of the workshop aimed to introduce all of these types of stakeholders to the interpretative strategy, to provide background knowledge on destination positioning, branding, unique selling points and heritage interpretation, as well as to identify already unique aspects of the cities' cultural heritage based on background material provided by the city partners. The format of the workshop was short briefings about these themes, with subsequent break out sessions where participants explored the themes through feedback worksheets and moderated discussion. In these sessions the participants captured tangible components of a destination's cultural heritage as key and smaller attractions and their attributes, explored possible stories and experiences within the city landscapes and attractions and reflected on them from the perspective of Unique Selling Points already capturing intangible attributes. The results of the workshops were summarized and distributed previous to the he final and third workshop. The aim of this workshop was to lead the three partner cities towards the development of the interpretative strategy for their own city as a cultural heritage tourist destination and to develop interpretative themes and key messages and then to evaluate how they could be applied for the city and further integrated in their own interpretative strategy. The workshop itself was structured to feed back and build on previous outcomes. The workshop participants then chose stories with the greatest potential in terms of interpretation and communication for cultural heritage tourism, and analyzed and evaluated them regarding potential for further development using SWOT analysis and reflection on its meaning. The workshops were held in the Amsterdam in English, Leipzig in German and Genoa in Italian to overcome language barriers. All workshop and supporting material was first produced in English, and then translated and cross-checked by representatives in the partner cities.

6 RESULTS

The identification of Amsterdam's main attractions was dominated by its tangible heritage. Museums were on the top of the list, followed by canals (either as attractive feature or in terms of services provided on them), the red light district, but also naming the city's architecture and its historical buildings. The intangible features identified were the city's culture and the (unspecified) mentality of its inhabitants. Key attributes combine both the appreciation of Amsterdam's intangible cultural heritage – foremost its atmosphere, but also the freedom the city provides. The more tangible attributes mentioned were the village-like compactness, and offering new and fun experiences as it is seen as being like an open-air museum offering direct experience of its cultural heritage.

Stories being told to tourists about Amsterdam are composed of a complex amalgam of *tangible* and *intangible* aspects of the city. Prime amongst these stories is the notion of the city as a continuous settlement, as living history where you can visit places people lived 400 years ago and still live today. But, written into these physical places, there is also the cultural history of a sea-going, trading, artistic and creative people. Commerce and creativity are seen as being made manifest in the form of the city and its buildings. But just as important are the intangible strands – the notion of Amsterdam as a liberal, friendly and tolerant city. The most potent strand of experiences was seen as moving to a compact historical space, on both land and water. This contains both a guided “exploration and interpretation” and an “unguided exploration”. In this sense a theme of hidden treasures emerged.

In the third workshop both group of participants explored the variety of stories connecting different aspects. An attempt was made to identify unifying factors which could be used to cluster these stories for subsequent development. The two main stories explored were a “guided tour through a diverse and living history” and a “non-guided tour – build your own Golden Age, her and now”. There was a strong support towards tours, and the routing mechanisms used to underpin these, as effective vehicles for integrating the diverse range of attractions and other elements of cultural heritage that the city has to offer. They also see tours as structuring devices that can both extend the range of attractions that tourists may visit and as a potent method of adding enhanced meaning – in the form of cultural heritage interpretation – to tourists’ experiences whilst they follow the routes provided.

The workshops’ findings for Genoa could play an interesting role in defining an appropriate strategy for the Genoa’s cultural tourism, contrasting the weaknesses and threats highlighted in the SWOT analysis. The main hidden treasure discovered through the workshop is actually the sea. The paradox is that cultural tourism linked to the aquatic theme is at the same time the main attraction of the city: both the Aquarium and the Galata museum of the sea work very well in this context. But participants stressed the necessity to re-discover the sea further, as resource both for activities on it, but also as a departure point to visit the historical urban centre and the surrounding mountains with its “Rolli palaces”, a UNESCO heritage in the very city centre, a new unique cultural focal point. These were connected to the more immaterial elements of the city, as its smells, classical and contemporary music, urban atmospheres and the particular pleasure of getting lost.

Overall, the sea and the “Rolli palaces” emerged as the two main stories, linking them not only in its physical space but also a re-thinking of traditional and quite hidden concepts of its particular features in relationship with the individual perception of the city, e.g. getting lost. This non-guided form of tours emerged in a similar way as in Amsterdam, in contrast to guided tours. Participants though stretched, that the experience of these stories shouldn’t only relate to the past but also include what they called “young” Genoa, the capital of innovation. It is clearly anticipated that this aims to replace the image of the city as the capital of an “old” county where Genoa is visited mainly for its climatic conditions in winter. Connecting these past and present perceptions of the city, Genoa is noticeably an example that heritage is not frozen in time, but constantly re-invented and lived in.

The third partner city, the city of Leipzig’s main focus was to explore opportunities for their specific cultural heritage related to the ‘Gründerzeit’, as part of its urban regeneration using tourism as one means to commodify its physical conservation but also its new use, capturing the spirit of the past time but also the present, its conservation process. From the outset of the workshops a lack of definition of ‘Gründerzeit’ emerged, suggesting for Leipzig has to establish a concept of ‘Leipziger Gründerzeit’ as a buzzword by stressing its special connection with the city, the civic society and with cultural heritage. In general, workshop participants described ‘Leipziger Gründerzeit’ as a locally-specific form of rapid economic and social growth between approximately 1880 and 1918. The unique characteristics that Leipzig had at this time in comparison to other German ‘Gründerzeit’ cities was viewed from a historical perspective and relates to the Bourgeois City with its rich culture, its specific and contingent cultural heritage and association with books and book fairs. From a modern day perspective, this still connects to the

contemporary city of fairs as well as to the unique structure and form of preserved buildings, architecture and their assemblages of the different quarters. This uniqueness was identified as the main potential of 'Gründerzeit' as a motivation to visitors. In particular, the architectural compactness and the range of different quarters that reflect both public and private elements of city life for a variety of different social classes were seen as being particularly interesting to potential visitors as well as the quality of the restoration of 'Gründerzeit' buildings and quarters. The stories identified were restoration of the cultural heritage of the 'Leipziger Gründerzeit', technical achievements, and the Bourgeois City. It was felt they had the most potential for being delivered in an exciting and engaging way for visitors, meaning that very careful attention should be paid to both the content and medium of any interpretation as well as ensuring that a variety of stakeholders can take part in delivering the stories at particular sites.

It was seen in particular interesting telling stories, connecting between the past and the present to enable visitors to make emotional and personal connections to the everyday settings of both domestic and working life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Moves could be made to ensure the integrity of any particular definitions of 'Gründerzeit' mobilised as part of an interpretative strategy, especially ensuring that the term is understood to refer variously to a period of time, a material landscape and a way of life. It will be important to maintain this unity of concepts in order to avoid confusing visitors and to ensure that any educational objectives are met.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The bottom up approach for the interpretative strategy enabled the cities to develop a different and deeper perspective on their cultural and heritage resources. By retaining an open mind, they reflected on their cultural assets, its novel combinations, and the aspects which can be valorized for tourism purposes, city life and culture and contribute to regeneration and conservation for the benefits of residents and tourists alike. The strategy development was city-driven, focusing on their own specifications of their particular needs to fill gaps and wants of stakeholders and city communities by providing understanding of and access to their particular cultural heritage and the places and stories connected to it. Participants of all workshops in all three cities had an urge to tell these stories, felt personally connected to them and therefore pushed developments further to make the story telling of their cultural heritage happen. The integration of citizen groups as representatives of the city's communities, stakeholders and destination managers proved to be valuable and was the key to the success of the achievements of these working groups. Driven by the ISAAC project representatives of each city, the workshops enabled them to provide a platform to enable this integration and communication between them, which continued beyond the workshops and will continue in the future.

The three workshops guiding the cities of Amsterdam, Leipzig and Genoa to an outline of an interpretative strategy demonstrated to the cities that, independent from their previous tourism marketing experience, they benefited from including interpretation in their marketing efforts. All partner cities benefited regardless of the previous level of their development of their positioning strategy. Each city started with a different focus but over time they all focused on a specific theme where they put in all their interpretation effort to be able to integrate interpretation, independently telling hidden treasure stories of their city.

The three examples of interpretative strategies demonstrate the usefulness of such strategies for destinations on a city or regional level, working to improve competitiveness through development of a stronger, more distinctive and unique positioning strategy. It enables communities to discover and connect with their heritage and to protect and sustain their heritage value. Furthermore, it facilitates cooperation between destination management, the destination stakeholders and local residents. Common elements of such an interpretative strategy should centre – as an attraction-based interpretative strategy would – on both intangible and tangible unique selling points of the city, its associated stories and prospectively interesting themes for visitors. This analysis of the status quo of a destination is connected to the aims and objectives of the interpre-

tative strategy, and with the broader strategic aims of the destination, as well as with current and prospective (new) target markets. Further elements within such a strategy need to reflect on mechanisms enabling these aims and objectives to be achieved, budget and management, and also possible factors affecting the implementation.

All three cities decided independently to tell the relatively hidden treasure of their city in the form of virtual guided walks, which can be used also on site. This means these stories were taken forward to be development within the ISAAC platform supporting both the pre-visit and the during visit periods. Cultural heritage in a city context lends itself for trail based interpretation. It is also an effective in integrating communities as a means, how they want to present themselves (Goodey 2006).

If tourism can be likened to a lifelong and career-like pursuit, it stands to reason that individuals will tend to collect sights/sites of varying degrees of uniqueness and standardization during their life course. Leipzig and Genoa need to grasp opportunities to present themselves as both uniquely and inherently interesting cities and as one of many European cultural heritage tourist-historic cities that are integrated into more complex itineraries. One of the ways in which this will be achieved is the operationalization of an interpretative strategy built upon the stories that have emerged from the ISAAC workshops in each of these cities. The task now is to ascertain how best to interpret and re-tell such stories in order to engage, touch and reach out to visitors before, during and after their visits. The intangibles of the cities cultural heritage need to be communicated to potential visitors alongside the tangible elements of cultural heritage - it is these intangible feelings, emotions and spirits that will enliven the material heritage

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